Raven's Call

National Weather Service - Anchorage Forecast Office

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NWS expands CoCoRaHS in Southwest Alaska

By David Kochevar

This past summer, the National Weather Service office in McGrath partnered with the Iditarod Area and Kuspuk school districts, to create a CoCoRaHS school observers network. Through this program, the NWS has supplied 13 schools throughout the Kuskokwim and Lower Yukon River valleys with the equipment to measure rainfall, snowfall, and snow depth at each school. Each school day morning, students and teachers use their equipment to take observations, and transmit it to the NWS via the internet using the CoCoRaHS website.

The McGrath office was very fortunate to be able to use each school district's Video Conference technology for training. During this, we showed the teachers where to place their equipment, as well as how to properly take each observation. With the help of the IT staff from each school district and GCI, we successfully trained a majority of the participating schools with a single training session from McGrath. This was crucial to making the network so large so quickly.

Here is a list of the participating schools:

From the Kuspuk School District: George Morgan Senior High School (Kalskag), Aniak Junior/Senior High School, Crow Village Sam School (Chuathbaluk), Johnnie John Senior School (Crooked Creek), George Willis Senior School (Red Devil), Jack Egnaty Senior School (Sleetmute) and Gusty Michael School (Stony River).

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Tsunami and Storm Ready

By Sam Albanese, Warning Coordination Meteorologist

The National Weather Service is dedicated to providing critical weather information essential for communities to be prepared for adverse weather and tsunamis. Along with the extraordinary efforts we have dedicated to forecasting the weather, we also work to coordinate with communities to be prepared for weather and non weather related hazards. A portion of these efforts are centered on the Tsunami and Storm Ready programs. Tsunami Ready and Storm Ready communities have coordinated with the National Weather Service and the Alaska Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management and the local emergency management officials to foster a better understanding of the threats and implement mitigation plans for communities at risk.

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Special points of interest:

- December 6 - Skywarn Recognition Day
- February - Science Olympiad
- March 25 - "Live" Statewide Tsunami Test

Inside this issue:

Skywarn Recognition Day

By ARRL and Renee Wise

For 364 days of the year, Amateur Radio operators with the Skywarn program provide the National Weather Service with critical, ground level reporting of major weather events. But one day a year, the ARRL, the national association for Amateur Radio, and Skywarn join in recognizing the hams' service and light up the airwaves just for fun.

This year's SKYWARN Recognition Day begins at 0000 UTC on December 6 and will last 24 hours. While some sites will use communications modes including PSK-31, RTTY, packet, and CW, most stations will operate on 80, 40, 20, 15, 10, and 2 meter frequencies using voice communications. The use of repeaters to make contacts is allowed. VoIP modes like IRLP and Echolink are also encouraged. There are no specific band plans for the event but participants are encouraged to make all contacts using portions of the bands available to Technician or General class licensees. The Extra portion of the bands may be used if band conditions get crowded. Participants will attempt to contact as many radio operators and NWS stations as they can and exchange signal strength, location, and current weather.

Across Alaska, National Weather Service offices in Juneau, Fairbanks, Anchorage, Kodiak, and Bethel will have HAM operators on site. For the first time, the Alaska Pacific Tsunami Warning Center in Palmer will also participate. On the morning of the 6th there will be a mock tsunami warning message that will help test HAM operators' emergency preparedness skills in the event other communication systems become inoperable during a "real" weather emergency.

Skywarn Recognition Day is not only fun, but also helps promote the usefulness of HAM Radio in Alaska. It also continues to build strong relationships between the emergency management community, the National Weather Service and local HAM operators.

CoCoRaHS Expansion, Cont'd.

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From the Iditarod Area School District: Blackwell School (Anvik), David-Louis Memorial School (Grayling), Holy Cross School, Innoko River School (Shageluk), McGrath School, Top of the Kuskokwim School (Nikolai), and the Takotna Community School.

As you can see, this program will supply the NWS Alaska Region with much needed precipitation data from areas which were not previously available. From a teacher's perspective, this program supplies them with hands on activities they can include in their science and math curriculums. NWS involvement also gives the kids a real life example of the science and math career field.

In the near future, we hope to further develop the network with the addition of liquid water equivalent of new snowfall and river conditions. We hope it will also help foster closer relationships with the schools to that will set the stage for future outreach activities.

The CoCoRaHS network is not just for schools, it is primarily a community based network of volunteer weather observers. Anyone with an interest in observing and reporting the weather can join. For more information on CoCoRaHS, or to join the program, please visit http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov/CoCoRaHs.

Storm and Tsunami Ready, Cont'd.

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Communities achieve the status of Tsunami and Storm Ready by meeting guidelines designed to ensure effective communication and dissemination of watches warnings and advisories. This includes establishment of a 24 hour warning point, and emergency operations center, and multiple methods to disseminate information to the public. It also includes conduction of awareness campaigns designed to teach the community about the risks to a community, establish evacuation routes and centers, distribution of educational material in the community and educational presentation in the local schools and at public meetings.

Awareness activities include public education which is a vital part to prepare citizens in a community to respond properly to weather and tsunami threats. An educated public is more likely to recognize potentially threatening weather and tsunami threats and react properly to them.

Prepared emergency managers have well thought out plans to insure as much of the community as possible will be notified of threatening weather or a tsunami. These communities have invested in sirens, phone messaging and local ability to override television and radio to broadcast messages.

The National Weather Service has distributed All Hazard NOAA Weather Radios (NWR) to schools and has coordinated that at least one NWR with a tone alert receiver has been located in critical public access government owned building to further insure reception of emergency messages.

Current Tsunami Ready communities within the Anchorage Forecast Office area of responsibility are Valdez, Seward, Homer, and Kodiak. Current Storm Ready Communities include Anchorage, Wasilla, McGrath, Seward, Kodiak, Homer and Valdez.

Currently, several communities are working with the Anchorage Forecast Office to achieve Tsunami and Storm Ready designation. These communities are Whittier, Cordova, Palmer, Sand Point and Dutch Harbor and the Kenai Peninsula Borough.

If your community is interested in pursuing Tsunami and Storm Ready status, please contact the Anchorage Forecast Office Warning Coordination Meteorologist, Sam Albanese for more information.

To contact Sam, either send an e-mail or call. Sam.Albanese@noaa.gov, 907-266-5117.

Cordova Boat Harbor - Low to Moderate Tsunami Threat

Picture by Renee Wise

NWS Anchorage
Weather Forecast Office

National Weather Service
6930 Sand Lake Road
Anchorage, AK 99502

Phone: 907-266-5105
Email: renee.wise@noaa.gov
Sam.albanese@noaa.gov

We're on the Web!

http://pafc.arh.noaa.gov

Farewell to Dave Vonderheide

By Renee Wise

Dave Vonderheide, HMT at WFO Anchorage, will be transferring to Flagstaff, AZ in December. Dave has been a part of the Alaska Region since 1990. He worked at WSO St. Paul and WSO Yakutat in the early 1990s. While in Yakutat, Dave built a two mile long foot trail from the Dangerous River road to reach the base of the mountains overlooking Harlequin Lake. This took two summers working on the trail on days off. The trail runs through Tongass National Forest and Russell Fjord Wilderness. The National Forest Service named the trail the Von der Heydt Trail, a misspelling Dave never had corrected.

At the Anchorage WFO, Dave became very involved in the climate program. He studied temperature microclimate patterns across the city, especially those occurring on clear nights. In early 1998, Dave was featured in a Daily News article documenting for the first time the differences in temperature across the city. During the deep cold spell of January 1999, he measured a minimum temperature of -45 degrees F in east Anchorage. Because of his enthusiasm for measuring this effect he was given the nickname "cold pocket hunter".

Through the years, Dave has been an active member of the American Meteorological Society, National Weather Association, Mount Washington Observatory, American Birding Association, Anchorage Audubon Society, Alaska Geology Society, and the Geological Society of America. His input and enthusiasm will be sorely missed. We wish you all the best in Flagstaff, Dave!